



Ballard News-Tribune



DEAN WONG/STAFF

A large green wooden sign marks the site of Ballard's newest park project, a 1.5-acre park that will occupy the existing parking lot and Segway building on Northwest 57th Street and 22nd Avenue Northwest. The skateboard park on the south side of the property was originally built as a temporary facility, but skateboard proponents would like to see it incorporated into the final park design.

**By Adam Richter
News-Tribune**

Ballard's Civic Center Park should be a quiet, contemplative space where people can go to enjoy peaceful solitude.

Ballard's Civic Center Park should cater to the active skateboarding population.

The new park ought to reflect the history and heritage of the surrounding neighborhood. It should be built looking forward, not backward.

Those were but a handful of the sentiments reflected at last week's public meeting that sought comment on the new Ballard Civic Center park, slated to be built on the site of the Segway building at 22nd Avenue Northwest

and Northwest 57th Street. The \$2.4 million renovation of the former Safeway building is the latest and most ambitious new park project in Ballard. Last Wednesday's meeting, held by Seattle Parks and Recreation sought — and received — a plethora of comments on what residents felt the future park should be.

Project manager Cathy Tuttle from Seattle Parks and Recreation likened the plans to an old Joni Mitchell song.

"They're pulling up a parking lot and putting up a park," she said — the opposite of the song, "Big Yellow Taxi" in which Mitchell sings, "They paved paradise/and put up a parking lot."

While most people seemed to look forward to the day when the Segway Building would meet its destined wrecking ball, one man lamented what a shame it would be to lose this sheltered, ostensibly public space. Owned by the city, the Segway building is leased by the organizers of the Ballard Sunday Farmer's Market.

Randi Hansen, a Ballard resident who lives near the proposed park, would like to see a gazebo. It could be used for performances, for gatherings, or for mere shelter. Hansen added that a gazebo could feature a design that speaks to the culture and history of the neighborhood.

"It would be a living monument to Ballard and to the heritage," she said.

Foremost on the minds of many people was the fate of the existing skateboard park on the south side of the property. Plans to build a park here existed long before the skateboard ramps, halfpipe and bowl were built. Since last year when the skateboard park was completed, it's become an immensely popular spot for skaters young and old.

"There's a lot of people, including me, that started skating because of that park," said Erik Bretz, a thirtysomething father who wants to see the skateboarding elements remain in the civic center park's ultimate design.

Keeping the skateboard park wasn't a universally loved idea, although skateboard proponents certainly attended the meeting in force Tuesday night. When asked to comment on what features they wanted for the park, many people called for retaining the skateboard segment. One person used six fluorescent pink notes to write one word: "BOWL" and stuck it on one of the comment boards scattered throughout the room.

(The c-shaped concrete bowl is the most popular feature at the existing park. Most of the materials and labor were donated to pay the \$20,000 tab.)

In some ways the planning for the Civic Center park represents a struggle between Ballard's past and future. Should the city build it for the older generation that lives here or for the younger crowd that has grown to love the skateboarding opportunities?

Many of the comments reflected this tension. The numbers of pro-skateboard comments overwhelmed much of the discussion, but there were still those who oppose keeping the skateboard park, and occasionally people made comments that had nothing to do with skateboarding. Tuesday's meeting served mostly as a community-wide brainstorming session that encouraged any and all ideas.

A handful of comments went so far as to suggest the Scandinavian theme in Ballard had been overdone. Those people were in the minority; few want the new park to reflect one interest group at the exclusion of all others.

"I hope there can be a balance between the skateboarding element and the older population," said Ballard resident Liza Halvorsen.

Keri Clark also wants to see a balance struck among the neighborhood's many different residents.

"This isn't just about having a skateboard park," she said. "This isn't just about having a lawn."

Even among the skateboard proponents, there was little consensus on keeping the skate park at the existing site. Some said they could live with removing the skate park from this location, as long as a new one were built elsewhere, like under the Ballard Bridge.

Kathie Huus from Seattle Parks and Recreation is the operations manager for Ballard's parks facilities. She encouraged people to consider designs that wouldn't require a great deal of maintenance, and therefore would improve the lifespan of the new park.

"We in Parks think of this as a 100-year park," she said.

Last week's meeting was the first of several public meetings that will take place before construction begins in January 2005. A briefing on the project will go before the Park Board at its Nov. 13 meeting.

For more information contact Cathy Tuttle at cathy.tuttle@seattle.gov.